

create opportunities for women across the country and ensure they can take advantage of them.

H.R. 774 improves the Small Business Administration's Women's Business Center Program by increasing the authorization for funding by \$3 million for Fiscal Year 2000, and reducing the amount of private funding that centers are required to have in their fifth and final year of operation. These two changes will strengthen this valuable program by providing additional funds so more Women's Business Centers can be opened and existing centers can continue to offer a variety of services in their fifth year.

This legislation will benefit the nineteenth district of Illinois by helping rural women business owners and promoting economic development, and urge my colleagues to join me in supporting this important measure.

Mrs. CAPPS. Mr. Speaker, today I rise in strong support of H.R. 774, the Women's Business Center Amendments Act.

In addition to reauthorizing this important program, this bill will increase funding for the Small Business Administration's Women's Business Center program by \$3 million. I strongly support the vision of this program as well as the increase in funding levels.

Providing assistance and services to women considering entrepreneurial endeavors is vital to the success of the economy of the 22nd District of Columbia and our entire nation. On the Central Coast, 80% of all business activity is generated by small business, and many of these businesses are run by women. Assisting small businesses, and ensuring that the doors of economic opportunity are open to all women, are priorities for me in Congress.

Currently, there are only 60 Women's Business Centers in 36 states, but many more are needed. At this time, women in my congressional district must travel over 100 miles to reach a center, and for many this distance precludes them from availing themselves of those resources. By increasing the funding for this program, we will be able to reach out to the many women that are now underserved on the Central Coast and throughout the nation.

Women's Business Centers assists women entrepreneurs at all levels of business development by teaching the principles of finance, management and marketing. The program has demonstrated particular success with low-income, single and minority women.

The assistance provided at Women's Business Centers enables women to fight poverty by giving them the tools to become self-sufficient, successful business owners who are leaders in their communities.

I strongly urge my colleagues to pass this bill and support the Women's Business Center program.

Ms. VELÁZQUEZ. Mr. Speaker, I yield back the balance of my time.

Mrs. KELLY. Mr. Speaker, I urge all Members to support H.R. 774, and I yield back the balance of my time.

The SPEAKER pro tempore (Mr. LINDER). The question is on the motion offered by the gentlewoman from New York (Mrs. KELLY) that the House suspend the rules and pass the bill, H.R. 774, as amended.

The question was taken.

Mrs. KELLY. Mr. Speaker, on that I demand the yeas and nays.

The yeas and nays were ordered.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Pursuant to clause 8 of rule XX and the Chair's prior announcement, further proceedings on this motion will be postponed.

GENERAL LEAVE

Mrs. KELLY. Mr. Speaker, I ask unanimous consent that all Members may have 5 legislative days within which to revise and extend their remarks on H.R. 774, the bill just considered.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Is there objection to the request of the gentlewoman from New York?

There was no objection.

DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA COURT EMPLOYEES WHISTLEBLOWER PROTECTION ACT OF 1999

Mr. DAVIS of Virginia. Mr. Speaker, I move to suspend the rules and pass the bill (H.R. 858) to amend title 11, District of Columbia Code, to extend coverage under the whistleblower protection provisions of the District of Columbia Comprehensive Merit Personnel Act of 1978 to personnel of the courts of the District of Columbia.

The Clerk read as follows:

H.R. 858

Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representatives of the United States of America in Congress assembled,

SECTION 1. SHORT TITLE.

This Act may be cited as the "District of Columbia Court Employees Whistleblower Protection Act of 1999".

SEC. 2. WHISTLEBLOWER PROTECTION FOR PERSONNEL OF THE COURTS OF THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA.

(a) IN GENERAL.—Subchapter II of chapter 17 of title 11, District of Columbia Code, is amended by adding at the end the following new section:

"§ 11-1733. Whistleblower protection for court personnel

"Notwithstanding any other provision of law, section 1503 of the District of Columbia Comprehensive Merit Personnel Act of 1978 (DC Code, sec. 1-616.3) shall apply to court personnel, except that court personnel may institute a civil action pursuant to subsection (c) of such section in the Superior Court of the District of Columbia or the United States District Court for the District of Columbia."

(b) CLERICAL AMENDMENT.—The table of sections for subchapter II of chapter 17 of title 11, District of Columbia Code, is amended by adding at the end the following new item:

"11-1733. Whistleblower protection for court personnel."

SEC. 3. EFFECTIVE DATE.

The amendments made by section 2 shall take effect as if included in the enactment of title XI of the Balanced Budget Act of 1997.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Pursuant to the rule, the gentleman from Virginia (Mr. DAVIS) and the gentlewoman from the District of Columbia (Ms. NORTON) each will control 20 minutes.

The Chair recognizes the gentleman from Virginia (Mr. DAVIS).

Mr. DAVIS of Virginia. Mr. Speaker, I yield myself such time as I may consume.

(Mr. DAVIS of Virginia asked and was given permission to revise and extend his remarks, and include extraneous material.)

Mr. DAVIS of Virginia. Mr. Speaker, H.R. 858 is a straightforward, bipartisan bill. It simply levels the playing field by providing employees of the D.C. Superior Court, many of whom are my constituents, the same whistleblower protections that are enjoyed by other city employees under the District's Merit Personnel Act. It is also in accordance with the protections which cover employees in the Federal court system. The only additional option we are providing for any claimants, for obvious reasons, is the possibility of seeking relief in either the local or the Federal courts.

The reason we need this bill, and we need to pass it in an expeditious fashion, is because of an ongoing GAO study of the financial and budgetary practices of the District of Columbia courts. At my request, management practices are being included in the GAO study.

On January 26, 1999, I joined with the gentleman from Oklahoma (Mr. ISTOOK), the chairman of the Subcommittee on the District of Columbia of the Committee on Appropriations, and the ranking member of that subcommittee, the gentleman from Virginia (Mr. MORAN), in encouraging the Superior Court to urge employees who may have information useful to the GAO auditors to step forward without fear of retaliation. These assurances were provided in the form of administrative orders. We are grateful for such assurances. The bill is intended to provide statutory guarantees that can back up the court's order. It also plugs a loophole in the law that would help to ensure that Congress and others will continue to get the most candid and accurate information.

It is obviously very important that when Congress asks for a GAO study, that GAO auditors be in a position to get the answers that they seek. Otherwise, Congress could be basing its subsequent oversight and legislation on misleading data. H.R. 858 would help to guarantee the integrity of the information Congress will be receiving.

The D.C. Superior Court has over 1,000 employees and an annual budget of over \$128 million. Whistleblower protection is by now a time-honored method of uncovering waste, fraud, abuse and mismanagement. It should also be noted that Title XI of the D.C. Code, which this bill amends, is the sole prerogative of Congress to change under the Home Rule Act.

I would emphasize that this legislation should not be misconstrued to cast any aspersions on those responsible for the sound management of the D.C. Superior Court. We are merely backing up the Court's own directives by providing routine protections which are overdue and which could help the GAO and Congress to receive the most accurate information.